



## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH JUDITH MILLER



### ***A Shining Light***

HOME TO AMANA

by Judith Miller

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**1. *A Shining Light* is your final book in the HOME TO AMANA series. Your previous series, DAUGHTERS OF AMANA, was also set in the Amana Colonies. After six books will you be sad to leave Amana and embark upon other writing projects?**

Yes, I'm very sad to leave Amana—at least for the time being. There are other aspects of the Colonists and their move to America that I haven't yet included in my stories. Those pieces of history could provide material for some exciting books in the future. However, for now, my journey with the people of Amana is over. I've made many friends in the Colonies who have provided me with excellent research materials, shared their experiences, and demonstrated their craftsmanship and faith to me. I'll be forever grateful for their generosity. It has been a blessing to share some of their history with my readers.

**2. Why did you decide to write books set in the Amana Colonies? Did something in particular draw you to that group of people?**

Many years ago, a friend told me about the Colonies. I'd never visited and she encouraged me to do so, as she thought I'd enjoy the rich history of the people and their culture. A few months later, I visited and decided my friend had been correct. The setting and the preservation of their history made the Colonies a rich setting for some wonderful stories. I am drawn to unique settings, and since few stories had been written about the people of Amana, I viewed the Colonies as a perfect setting for my novels.

**3. Since you've written six books set in Amana, was less research required as you continued through the two series?**

I'd say that the first books required the most research into the religion and culture of the Colonies, but each book is set in a different village, and the years and characters vary from book to book since they are independent series. Consequently, each novel required research of the particular village where the book would be set as well as gleaning information for any craft or trade I might feature in the book. For instance, *A Shining Light* is set in West Amana in 1890 and the male protagonist, Dirk Knefler, is a tinsmith. In order to learn about the craft, I met with William Metz, who still has some original tinsmithing tools in his basement, where he continues to create some of the pieces used many years ago. Bill demonstrated the tools for me and answered my many questions about the process of tinsmithing. The tinnerns made the downspouts used on Amana houses, as well as kitchen utensils and many other items. They also repaired tools and utensils for outsiders who would come to the village and request their services.

I particularly enjoy research, so it was fun discovering unique professions and exploring the methods used to create or perform a craft. I think readers are going to particularly enjoy learning about the work of a tinsmith from Dirk, the male protagonist in this book.

**4. Since the people of Amana lived communally, why did they divide into seven villages rather than live in one large group? Do they still live communally? If not, when and why did they give up that lifestyle?**

The people of Amana farmed a vast amount of land. They purchased 26,000 acres and were the largest landowners in the state of Iowa. In order to farm their land, they divided into seven villages that surrounded their farmland. This made it easier for the men to get back and forth to

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the fields where they worked using the least amount of time. They were an efficient group of people and, unlike the Amish, developed and used mechanized equipment. They believed in using any time-saving devices in order to gain additional time to worship God. During the early years, they attended religious meetings eleven times a week, exclusive of special observances for religious holidays. The people of Amana voted to cease living communally in 1932. That event is known as “The Great Change.” There are varying reasons for the decision, but enough of the outside world had invaded the villages to create a desire among the majority to embark on an individualistic lifestyle.

**5. What is the religion of the Amana people and does it still exist?**

Their formal name is the Community of True Inspiration. The members are known as Inspirationists. They were founded upon the belief that God, through the Holy Spirit, offered direction to some of their leaders. During the religious persecution that occurred in Europe, the group fled and moved to America in 1843. Today, they continue to worship in the same manner as they did many years ago. An early morning church service is conducted in German at the Middle Amana meetinghouse and a later service is conducted in English. Visitors are welcome to attend either of the services. Singing is a cappella, since they do not have musical instruments in their services. Men and women continue to sit on opposite sides of the church and the elders lead the church service.

**6. Can you tell us a little more about the characters/story in *A Shining Light*?**

Andrea Wilson is a young woman who has made some decisions that result in a great deal of heartache. Having grown up on a farmstead situated adjacent to the Amana Colonies, she leaves the area with her husband, a sailor, and they settle in Baltimore. Her husband is eventually lost at sea. With nowhere else to go, she and her young son return to Iowa, where she hopes to begin life anew, but her return forces her to make even more difficult decisions that will impact her future as well as the future of her son, Lukas.

Dirk Knefler has grown up and lived his entire life in West Amana. He is a kind and generous man who works as a tinsmith. His life intersects with that of Andrea and her son, but he soon realizes he will be forced to make difficult choices if he gives his heart free rein and succumbs to his growing love for both of them.

**7. Is there anything else you’d like to add about your novels set in the Amana Colonies?**

For anyone who hasn’t had the opportunity to visit, I would encourage you to spend a long weekend in the Colonies, where they continue to create handmade furniture, the woolen mill is still in operation and there are pastries and chocolates to please any palate, as well as restaurants serving authentic German cuisine.